

## love and mathematics by jaekyu

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**Summary:**

The parts that create the whole; Steve Harrington has never been the boy he thought he was.

## love and mathematics

### Author's Note:

I started writing this before S2 dropped so this a) is set between season one and season two and b) doesn't line up with canon at all, lol. I'm still holding out hope this ship will be canon because I love being disappointing. Title came from a Broken Social Scene song and I listened to Broken Social Scene's [Halfway Home](#) constantly while I wrote this so I guess this OT3 is just a Broken Social Scene OT3.

**a few words of caution:** Steve struggles with bisexuality a lot in this fic (based a lot on some of my own experiences) and I understand that that can be upsetting for some people so I want to make it clear that is the *focus* of this fic, as much as it's a negotiation of polyamorous relationship. There's also a few sexual situations involving teenagers here but nothing graphic. The scenes exist not to be titillating but to advance character development. No problem skipping this one if any of these things upset you, though.

all this dirt is my disease, please, please  
wanted hands but I got knees

(WYE OAK, "FOR PRAYER")

JUNE, 1984.

It's hard to believe Hawkins could ever go back to normal after the things that happened that fall, but they do. The seasons keep changing. Put Hawkins up to any other small All-American town in the summertime and there's no difference. There's no way to tell them apart.

Steve hates it. Because it's not like nothing ever happened, or everyone forgot about it, or everyone just moved on. Steve hates it because it's not genuine. It's fake. Everyone's just pretending they forgot, or they're over it. What a fucking tragedy. No one can even look each other in the eyes when they say Will Byers' name. Everyone tries really hard to not even say his name when they talk about him.

Steve hates it because everyone's doing it and everyone's pretending they don't notice.

Steve hates it, really, because that fall in Hawkins sometimes feels like the only thing that tethers him to Nancy and Jonathan. And if they all forget about it, if they cut that rope, what happens then?

i.

Summer arrives in Hawkins the same way it does every year: tacked onto a spring breeze that turns the whole town sweltering hot.

For the summer Nancy wears her hair up, gathered on the top of her head in a mess of a ponytail. It's too hot and her hair is too thick to wear down, she says, but then she takes to wearing these tiny spaghetti strapped tank tops that leave her bare from chin to collarbones and Steve begins to suspect it's more than just that.

Nancy's shoulders bare all summer leave her with a dusting of freckles that go from the base of her neck where her hairline ends, lower and lower, to some part of her lower spine that disappears behind the fabric of her shirts.

She has a few on her hands, gathered at the delicate circle of her wrist and spread across the front of her hand. Steve counts them while Nancy peels a big, fat orange and the juice gets all over her hands. She gives a piece to Steve, then a piece to Jonathan.

When she kisses Steve she tastes like oranges, sweet and tart, and she tastes like Jonathan, too, a taste Steve can't quite describe.

There's innocence trapped in the constellation of freckles on Nancy's chest and back, and when Steve presses his hand against Nancy's front or back when he kisses her, it feels like ruining something.

The first boy Steve ever kissed was named Ian. He had been Steve's best friend until Ian's family moved to Boston because his dad got a better paying job.

Ian's mom had died when he was a baby but his dad had remarried. Ian had a nice step-mom who let Ian call her mom and bought him things and took him to baseball practice. It made Steve angry when he was younger, that Ian had got to have two moms over the course of his life that cared about him and Steve didn't even get one.

They were thirteen when they kissed. Steve was sleeping over at Ian's. They had an air mattress in front of the television in the downstairs living room, leaking out little puffs of air every time they moved around. The TV was off. Steve didn't know how late it was, only that it was so dark he couldn't even see his own hand in front of his face.

Out of the darkness, Ian's voice asked him, "have you ever kissed a girl?"

Steve shook his head. He hadn't even thought about what it might be like to kiss a girl. But it was dark. Ian couldn't see him shake his head.

Ian's hands found Steve's face in the dark, floundering across his temple and jaw before they found symmetry on each of his cheeks. Ian had rough hands, probably because he played baseball and he was a kid, who stuck himself up to his elbows in dirt and grass and climbed against wood and bark. His mouth was soft when he kissed Steve and he tasted like Sour Patch Kids.

It was the kind of kiss expected between preteen boys: dry and fast. Neither of them knew what to do or how to figure out what to do, so they didn't do anything. They kissed, then they stopped, and when they woke up the next morning all the air in the mattress had leaked out.

The first time Steve kissed a girl was a week after he kissed Ian. He had been desperate for some kind of clarity, but then he kissed Abby Raymond after school one day and just felt more confusion.

Ian moved away before the start of the next school year, before Steve ever had the courage to try and kiss him again.

ii.

Jonathan kisses Steve first. And, that? Steve doesn't think anyone could have expected that.

They're at Steve's house, as big and lonely as it always is, backpacks with open zippers spilled open across Steve's bedroom floor. Nancy has homework, and that's one of the best things about being friends with Jonathan now, too: Steve has someone to invite over so his house doesn't feel so empty.

"Springsteen is the man," Steve says. They're listening to *Born in The U.S.A* and eating a half-empty bag of chips Steve found in the pantry.

Jonathan shrugs, "he's alright," he says. "He writes good lyrics, I'm just not sold on his instrumentals."

Steve waves him off. "You like all that weird stuff, though. What's that guys name? Brian Eskimo?" He steals a chip right from between Jonathan's fingers.

"Brian Eno," Jonathan laughs.

"That guy," Steve pokes Jonathan's chest. They're both laughing. "That guy's weird."

Jonathan rolls his eyes. "He's interesting," he replies defensively. "I mean, Springsteen's kinda predictable."

Steve holds his hand over his heart in mock scandal. "Did you just discredit The Boss? Under my roof, eating my food? That's some nerve, Byers."

Steve shoves Jonathan's shoulder, then Jonathan shoves him back, and it devolves into a sort of play wrestling that before they became friends Steve would have never expected to be something Jonathan would do. And yet, somehow, Jonathan manages to catch Steve off-guard and next thing Steve knows Jonathan's got him pinned to his own bed, sitting on the cradle of his hips, breathing heavy and flushed in his face and smiling.

"Damn, Byers," Steve breathes. The tortilla chips are spilled all over his bed, he'll need to vacuum before his parents come home, but Jonathan is so warm against all the parts of Steve he's touching, and Steve can't really think beyond that. Over on the record, Springsteen's crooning, he's saying I need a love reaction, come on baby, give me just one look.

There's a moment of silence, then Jonathan says, "have you ever kissed a guy?"

Steve doesn't know why he does it, why he's okay with saying it, but he bites his lip and nods. "Just once," he replies.

“Oh,” Jonathan says it so low Steve almost doesn’t hear.

And then Jonathan kisses him.

When Steve told Nancy she had hid a laugh behind the back of her hand. “What’s so funny?” He asked her.

“Nothing,” she replied, shaking her head, “you’re just - you’re blushing.”

Steve goes down a girl for the first time when he’s a junior.

She was older; a freshman in college who worked at the grocery store near Steve’s house. She always left the top two buttons of her blouse undone, tits spilling out the top in a way that would seem coy if it wasn’t so obviously on purpose.

She teaches Steve how to press and lap and lick and where to put his hands and Steve finds he likes it, a girl pinned under him as he works away at her. Her hands in his hair, nails against his scalp.

She invites him to a college party. She’s there the first time Steve goes down on a guy, at that party, and that’s almost a little poetic. This girl, not quite Steve’s girlfriend and they’ll never actually make it to that point, is the one to tell Steve he should do it. That he should let this drunk older college boy who’s been putting his hands on Steve all night get off.

Steve finds he likes that, too. It’s different from a girl, the feeling of his mouth all full and his tongue pinned against the bottom of it. But

it's the same taste of skin, the same feeling of a hand pulling his hair. It's almost the same thing. It's basically the same thing. It might as well be the same thing.

God, Steve thinks that night after he goes home, he sure is kind of fucked up, isn't he?

### iii.

Nancy and Jonathan seem to be broadcasting their thoughts on some frequency that Steve doesn't know, because they fall in line with each other so easy and quickly, and Steve just doesn't get it.

He expects this whole thing, the three of them not being the three of them, but rather three parts of one whole, to be much more complicated. He expects an adjustment period. Things tend to become inherently more complicated the more people are involved but somehow -

Nancy kisses Steve and Jonathan is just - there, and that's a thing now, and Steve's head is spinning. Nancy spreads her legs around Steve's hips and kisses him more, places Steve's hands on the inside of her thighs. Her skirt rides up and her skin is soft underneath it.

And Jonathan is there, and when Nancy pulls away from Steve she kisses Jonathan, and then angles Steve's face away from her with two fingers on his chin so Jonathan can kiss him.

They're at Steve's house. His parents are never home, he has no siblings, so they're always at Steve's house. Maybe that's part of what makes it so overwhelming: because Steve will look around his room tomorrow, in a week, in a month, and see the spot where Jonathan was sitting on his bed, and Nancy, and himself, and how the sheets rumbled in the corners, and the way the light came in from his window.



(The first time he and Nancy had sex was in this room, too. Steve could draw a map of it; the two of them coming in through the door, the spots there wet clothes landed. The parts of the mattress that Steve laid Nancy against. The parts where his own weight sunk the mattress even more.)

(The first time Steve and Jonathan -

That was Jonathan's room. Joyce Byers was at work and Will was with Mike and, logically, Lucas and Dustin too. Nancy was - somewhere. Debate club, homecoming committee, something like that.

Jonathan always kissed Steve first. Steve didn't know how to approach it himself so Jonathan always kissed him first. And then, it was weird, because like a mirror of Steve and Nancy, Jonathan pushed Steve down onto his bed and undid his pants and slipped his hand inside and.

But that wasn't in this room.)

Jonathan sits behind Nancy, kisses her jaw and neck and shoulder, and Steve's grip on Nancy's waist flounders. Jonathan's put his hands over Steve's and suddenly, before Steve can think, he's jerking his hand away like he's been burned.

Jonathan lifts his head. Nancy's brows furrow. "Steve?" She asks, voice careful. She's so diplomatic. Steve loves her so much.

Jonathan must love her too.

“Steve, are you okay?” Steve doesn’t know who says it. His blood is rushing through his ears.

Steve doesn’t know what to say, either. He swallows, again and again, and then he feels like he can’t breathe. They must read it on his face, because Jonathan slides off the bed and Nancy slides off Steve’s lap. “I -” Steve tries. “I need you to leave.”

The hurt is written all over Nancy’s face. Jonathan’s is hidden lower, in the way he sets his jaw.

“Okay,” Nancy says. “Okay, we can go.” Jonathan doesn’t say anything.

Steve puts his head in his hands.

#### iv.

Steve doesn’t speak to Nancy or Jonathan for three days. He skips school on Friday, and then it’s the weekend, and he lays in his bed and eats bowl after bowl of cereal and feels sorry for himself.

His mom makes him sit at the breakfast block in the kitchen while she cooks dinner on Sunday. Steve’s parents are rarely ever home on Sunday’s at dinner time, usually on the way home from some trip, and Steve’s mother even more rarely cooks dinner.

Guess it’s just a weird week for Steve.

“Stevie,” She says, stirring spaghetti sauce. She hasn’t called him that since he was five. “I don’t know what’s happening with you right now but - I worry about you, Stevie.”

Well, shit. If one of his oblivious parents noticed, Steve must be really fucked.

Steve fucked one guy before Jonathan. And this was - he meant *really* fucked, not just put the guy's dick in his mouth, or rubbed himself off against, or exchanged handjobs with.

His name was Alex. He was the same age as Steve. He had a lot of messy black hair and a wiry frame and Steve had been between girlfriends. And Alex had said, *I won't tell if you won't*, and Steve hated the thought but he agreed. He didn't know what he was doing and he needed to figure it out and he couldn't tell anyone. Not yet, maybe not ever.

It was after a party in Alex's bed. It was bad, because neither of them knew what to do, but it wasn't awful. Afterwards, Steve thought, *I could do this again*.

They didn't tell anyone. They didn't talk about it.

Steve sees Alex in the halls at school sometimes.

Alex saw Steve holding Nancy's hand, once, and had given him this look - confusion and sadness, only not really sadness, more like pity - and Steve was somehow still a mystery to one of the only people who had seen the other side of his coin flip of a life.

v.

God forbid, Steve would rather fight a hundred faceless monsters than talk to Nancy. Too bad it's not a multiple choice and Steve doesn't get any other options.

Nancy waits for him at his car after school on Monday.

"Where's Jonathan?" Steve asks. He means it. Because maybe Jonathan's not here because he's decided he hates Steve.

"Picking Will up." Nancy answers. Steve feels the vice around his heart and lungs loosen. "I wanna talk."

"We can talk." Steve opens the passenger side door for Nancy. She slides inside like the spot is *her* spot.

"Do you wanna drive around?" She asks.

Steve shakes his head. He tightens his hands on the grip of the wheel. "Let's stay here," he says. He doesn't add, *so I can ask you to get out if I need you to get out without worrying about how you're gonna get home.*

"Okay," Nancy smiles. It's one of those sad, half-smiles, and it's only there for Steve's benefit. He feels guilty. "I wanna - I wanna ask what happened. And I don't want you to be afraid to tell me."

It's not that Steve doesn't want to tell her; it's that he doesn't know how. And that's always been his problem, hasn't it? He's got all these things he understands about himself, a handful of thoughts and ideas cupped in his palms, and he's got nowhere to put them. There's no empty drawer to fill, a cabinet to push them to the back of the let them gather dust. So he's holding all of this in his hands. Somewhere along the way it's just his heart in his hands, blood thrumming through his fingers with every pulse. Soon everything is going to slip away, and Steve won't be able to grab all of it, and this is all because he doesn't know where to put it. Because he doesn't know how to say it.

He wants to say *there are parts of my that I categorize. There's a venn diagram only the circles never meet. There's a circle for Ways To Love Nancy and there's another for Ways To Love Jonathan and they were*

*never meant to touch. They did, though, they just slid together like they were meant to be that way. Like it's supposed to be the same thing. And everything I've ever felt ever has told me they're not allowed to be the same thing.*

All Steve says is: "I never thought I could have both."

Nancy puts a hand on his cheek and all she has to say is, "you already do."

And Steve believes her.

After school finishes for the summer, Steve drives them down to the lake to go swimming. It's dark by the time they make it, stopping for ice cream and again for gas, but they don't bring bathing suits, so the nighttime serves to hide them swimming in their underwear.

Steve's hands are still sticky from his ice cream. He pushes Jonathan's head under the surface of the water when he complains that it's too cold, laughs with Nancy when he comes back up sputtering. Laughs even harder when Jonathan tries to get him back.

It's late and it's quiet and there's no one around and it's almost like they're the only people in the whole world. And Steve thinks: a world with just the three of them would be much less complicated. It would be easier. Steve could just let himself *be* and he wouldn't have to think about how to explain things. There would be no one to explain anything too.

Steve lets himself take advantage of the moment. He kisses Nancy hidden in the curtain of her wet hair, stuck to her flushed cheeks and her freckled shoulders. He kisses Jonathan too. It's funny, he thinks, he knows how to hold Nancy and how to be with her, but he's less preoccupied with how to touch and hold onto Jonathan, so Steve

kisses him harder. Then Jonathan kisses Nancy.

This should feel more like sharing, like compromise, Steve thinks. But it doesn't. Because when you're sharing someone is always missing something the other person has. And with compromises no one is hundred percent happy, it's more of a split. But Steve watches Jonathan kiss Nancy and doesn't feel like he's missing anything at all.

On the way home Nancy falls asleep on Steve's shoulder, fingers laced with Jonathan's. Steve wishes the road home could stretch forever. That it could be just this world, just with the three of them, for as long as possible.

The thing is is that Steve thought he was lucky enough just to have Nancy.

He understood there was these parts of him; the parts that kissed Ian when he was thirteen, the parts that wanted to be with that college boy off at that college party, the parts that looked too long at the flat chests of boys in the gym shower. But he knew they were just that; parts. There were other parts, the parts that made him want Nancy, all the softness of her body, and that kept him from looking down any lower than abs in the shower.

Parts that never really fit right to make a whole. Steve felt like a puzzle with a piece missing; almost there, and you can see the picture, you know exactly what you need, but it's not really whole is it? It won't satisfy you until it is.

And then - then the three of them sorted melted together like wax held up to flame, and Steve felt less like something unfinished and more like something real, something finished, something understood.

Because here were the two parts of him: the parts that loved Nancy, the parts that could love Jonathan, and he was experiencing them both at the same time. Steve didn't understand it all yet, it hadn't all

become a melting pot of stuff that he couldn't organize just yet, but he was starting to think that didn't matter.

There was no separation. No more parts.

Just a whole.

vi.

The first person Steve ever loves is Nancy Wheeler; he gets to love a second without ever having to lose her.

**Author's Note:**

fun drinking game when reading my fic: take a shot  
every time i mention bruce springsteen